

*Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009*

**Remarks at a Fundraiser for Senator Arlen Specter in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

*September 15, 2009*

*The President.* Hello, Philadelphia! It is good to be back in Philly with a man who's always put his State before politics, before party, your Senator, Arlen Specter.

We've got a number of other luminaries here today, starting with the great Governor and sports fan—[*laughter*—here in Pennsylvania, Ed Rendell is in the house; the outstanding young mayor of the city of Philadelphia, Michael Nutter, is here. Not here, but I want to give him a shout-out anyway because we're in his district, Congressman Bob Brady, doing great work for us. Senator Bob Casey is on the way and will be here soon, and we love Bob Casey. T.J. Rooney, chairman of the Democratic State party, is here. And I want to acknowledge a special friend, somebody who is a great supporter of mine and is the chairman of this event, David Cohen is in the house. Please give him a round of applause.

Now, I want to say a few things about Arlen Specter. Arlen's not someone who came to Washington to fight for a particular ideology. He came to fight for the working men and women of Pennsylvania. And he has a long and successful record of doing just that. This is a man who has voted to raise the minimum wage 20 times, because he understands if you work in this society, you shouldn't be in poverty. This is a man who's fought for workplace safety and mine safety, who stood up for the American steelworker and American manufacturer, who has voted to extend unemployment benefits time and time again.

I'll never forget that in the height of this recession, when we had just been sworn in—you remember? There's some selective memory going on out there. [*Laughter*] But you remember what it was like. We thought we might be tipping into a great depression, losing 700 [700,000]<sup>\*</sup> jobs per month; financial system on the verge of collapse. We had to act boldly; we had to act swiftly. And Arlen Specter cast the deciding vote in favor of a Recovery Act that has helped pull us back from the brink, a Recovery Act that's already making a difference in the lives of millions of Pennsylvanians.

Since the Recovery Act was signed, nearly 5 million Pennsylvanians are seeing a tax cut in their paycheck. Think about that, 5 million people getting tax cuts, as I promised during the campaign. We provided relief to 2.5 million seniors and veterans and other struggling Americans. This puts money in their pockets. That means they're spending it in small businesses and circulating it within the economy.

We've extended unemployment benefits for over 800,000 Pennsylvanians who've borne the brunt of this recession. We've approved over 700 loans to small businesses throughout Pennsylvania.

You talk to your Governor, Ed Rendell, about the kinds of drastic cuts and layoffs that would have had to occur had it not been for the Recovery Act; tens of thousands of State workers potentially laid off.

At the time, this was not an easy vote for Arlen to take. You can imagine the pressure he was under from the other side. But Arlen knew that it was more important to answer to the

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<sup>\*</sup> White House correction.

people who sent him to Washington than to the party he belonged to. And that's why you should send him back to Washington for six more years, because you know he's going to fight for you regardless of what the politics are.

For the same reason that Arlen has been fighting so hard for health insurance reform, for him, this is not an issue of politics or party, this is personal. This is a man who has seen the health care system up close, the good and the bad. This is a man who courageously battled cancer and is here today because he was able to receive some of the best health care available in the world, and also because he's a tough son of a gun. *[Laughter]* And he knows that. And he believes that every American should be able to get that kind of care, no matter who you are or how much money you have. That's why he's spent the summer holding town hall meetings across the State. That's why he hasn't been afraid to take some criticism and some hard questions and occasionally some—well—*[laughter]*—he knows how important it is to pass health care reform this year.

It has now been nearly a century since Teddy Roosevelt first called for health care reform. It's been attempted by nearly every President and every Congress ever since. And our failure to get it done year after year, decade after decade, has placed a burden on families, on businesses, and on taxpayers that we can no longer sustain.

We know what will happen if we don't do anything, if we fail again. If we do nothing, premiums will continue to rise faster than your wages. If we do nothing, more businesses will close down; fewer will open in the first place. If you have health insurance, you are going to see more and more of those costs taken out of your paycheck. And eventually, some of your employers are going to decide, we just can't afford to bear the burden.

If we do nothing, we will eventually spend more on Medicare and Medicaid than every other Government program combined. We would end up having to use all the money that we currently spend on student loans or national parks or Department of Homeland Security—all of that would be consumed by Medicare and Medicaid if we don't make a change in the system. That is not an option for the United States of America. Arlen Specter understands it's not an option. That's why he's fighting alongside me to get this thing done. Because as I said last week, I may not be the first President to take up the cause of health care reform, but I'm determined to be the last.

The plan we've put forward will offer security to those Americans with health insurance. It will offer health insurance that's affordable to those who don't have it right now. And it will bring down the cost of health care for families and businesses and taxpayers.

If you're among the hundreds of millions of Americans who already have health insurance through the job or Medicare or Medicaid or the VA, nothing in this plan will require you or your employer to change your coverage or drop the doctor that you have. But what it will do is it will make sure that even if you lose your job, you can still go get health insurance, even if you have a preexisting condition.

*Audience member.* Yea!

*The President.* We'll—this young lady knows all about that. It will make sure that your out-of-pocket costs are capped, that you are not—meaning, on the other hand, a lifetime cap, where at a certain point an insurance company just says, "You know what? We can't pay anymore." It will make insurance work better for you. That's if you have health insurance.

Now, if you don't have health insurance, you're going to be able to buy into an exchange with millions of other Americans, which means you have leverage and you can now get the same kind of better deal that people who work for the biggest companies, or work for the Federal Government, or, by the way, our Members of Congress are able to get for themselves. That's a deal that all Americans should be able to enjoy.

*Audience member.* Particularly Joe Wilson! [*Laughter*]

*The President.* Now, everybody knows we have to change the system. But people have a legitimate question, and that is, how are we going to pay for all this? Arlen is fiscally conservative. He doesn't want us—see us wasting taxpayer dollars. Neither do I. We can't afford it, especially when we inherited a \$1.3 trillion deficit, in part because the war in Iraq and the war in Afghanistan and the prescription drug plan and tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans were not paid for. I'm not going to make that same mistake when it comes to health care. Arlen Specter will make sure we don't make that same mistake.

And that's why what we've said is, let's use the money that's being wasted in the system right now—subsidies to insurance companies that are already making a profit; tens of billions of dollars in waste and abuse—the majority of this health care plan can be paid for with money that's already in the system but just not used wisely, not making people healthier.

And I want to say to all the senior citizens out there, don't let these folks scare you about Medicare. Nobody has been more of a champion of Medicare than me and the Democratic Party. We are going to keep on doing it. Not a dollar is going to come out of the Medicare trust fund. Don't believe these stories. We want to make Medicare stronger and close that doughnut hole in the Medicare system that is causing seniors to have to shell out thousands of dollars for their prescription drug costs.

We're going to get this done. This is going to be a priority because one of the things that Arlen Specter came to Washington to do is to solve problems. He and I, even when we were on the opposite side of the aisle, understood that the American people aren't looking for slogans, they're not looking for ideology, they're not looking for bickering. They're looking for the solutions that can help build a foundation for long-term economic growth and security for the American middle class. That's what they're looking for. That's what we're fighting for.

But we can't do it without you. There is a lot of noise out there. There's a lot of misinformation out there, not just on health care. We also need to have a clean energy economy that can produce good jobs that can't be outsourced. We've got to have the school system that works for every American and every young person here in Philadelphia.

Those are all parts—part of a foundation for long-term economic growth. And it's not going to happen unless the American people mobilize and say to themselves, "Now is the time. We're going to stop putting off the tough problems."

I understand that the American people are feeling anxious and we're going through a recession right now, and people are wondering, can this be the "American century" the way the 20th century was the "American century"? I know that there are doubts that creep into people's minds. I know that there's a tendency during tough times for us to turn on each other instead of come together. But the one thing that American history shows us is that each and every time that we confront major challenges, each—every time where we come to that fork in the road where we can keep on doing the same thing and going into slow decline, or we can go through some transformation and make some changes even when they're hard, we always take the harder, better road.

We do it not only for ourselves; we do it for our children, we do it for our grandchildren. We know that the central idea in America is, we don't have to stand pat; we are going to make sure that the next generation has it better off than we do. We're going to build a stronger America, a more prosperous America, a more secure America.

That's why Arlen got into politics so many years ago. That's why he was a prosecutor. That's why he has excelled in the United States Senate. That's why he is—he was a great Senator when he was a Republican; he's going to be a even better Senator now that he's a Democrat. And that's why you are all going to work just as hard as you can to make sure that he gets reelected and is continuing to help me move this country forward.

Thank you very much, Philadelphia. I love you, and I love Arlen Specter. I appreciate you guys. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:08 p.m. at the Pennsylvania Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to David L. Cohen, executive vice president, Comcast Corporation.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Senator Arlen Specter, fundraiser in Philadelphia, PA.

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